

POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

267

too long to be a popular favourite, and the reproduction of so many Parliamentary debates is an artistic mistake. Yet it is full of interest, for he was an able, attractive, highly cultivated man, loyal to his principles and of singularly independent mind.

The drama is dominated by the figure of Napoleon III, whom Oüivier successively opposed, partially converted and faithfully served, and for whom he entertained affectionate respect. Though the ruler moved too slowly for his taste towards

UEwpire Liberal, he is presented net as a reactionary usurper but as a statesman capable of rendering immense services to France. Since the Bourbon and Orleans lines had been driven from the throne, and since the Parliamentary Republic of 1848 was a failure, why should not the nephew of the Petit Caporal found a new dynasty ? " He honoured me with his friendship till Ms last day. . . . I often attacked his acts, but even in his faults there was something intelligent, loyal, patriotic,

generous/* The young Prefect met him shortly before his election as President of the Republic, and his account of the *coup d*etat* of 1851, which led to the banishment of his father, is very different from the invective of Victor Hugo or Kinglake. The President, we are told, honestly tried to work the Constitution and felt grave scruples in breaking his oath. He was one of the last, not one of lie first, to wish for a change. Thiers, an ambitious *fanfaron*, " talking first, last and all die time," was partially responsible, for he prevented harmonious co-operation between the President and the Chamber. It was as salutary as Brumaire, for France was sick of the sterile debates. Oüivier, like Louis Napoleon, was convinced that the mass of the French people wished for the Empire and

supported it when it came.

Whatever he found to blame, such as the Mexican adventure, the savage repression after the Orsini plot, and the loose living of the ruler—il aimait beaucoup trop les dames—Ollivier saw no alternative. He praises the serenity of "ce philosophe humanitaire," "ce Marc Aurele," and pays tribute to the goodness of his heart. When, after several years of Parliamentary activity, he was invited to the Tuileries in 1865 he pleaded for his project of a Liberal Empire. The two men took to each other, but Ollivier declined office till he felt sure that his wishes would be met. In equally frank talks with the Empress he was impressed by her range of knowledge and quickness of mind. He deplored the death of Morny in 1867 not only as a friend